

REPORT OF TRAINING METHODS AND RESULTS,

Extension Farm Labor Program - 1943-47 1/

Training is a familiar, daily, accepted part of all farm operations. Cautioning a worker to watch the oil in the tractor, to cut the alfalfa a little higher, to stretch the new fence a bit tighter is routine. But when workers are new and must be taught everything from setting an alarm clock to blowing out a lamp, training becomes a major task, a major consideration.

The responsibility for final training rests largely with the farmer. He is the man who really needs the training help. The five ways used to assist him were:

1. To break in the new workers as much as possible before they came on the farm.
2. To develop work leaders who could take over the supervision of the working crew.
3. To provide training aids that the farmer could use himself.
4. To develop better work methods for doing farm jobs.
5. To hold round-table discussions on labor management.

Preparatory Training

Preliminary training schools, ranging from an occasional Saturday session to a 2- or 3-week short course, were used to prepare city people for work on farms. This training was designed to help folks make the shift to life in the country and to provide specific training for selected farm jobs. These courses were conducted at schools, colleges, or camps, and on selected farms. Instructors were usually teachers, extension personnel, farmers, and an occasional specialist from industry.

The boys, girls, and women--the principal enrollees of these training schools--attended in order to learn something new. They were going out on farms to do something that neither they nor their friends had done before. This made it important that these sessions be well organized and equipped. Practice in handling actual crops, machinery, and livestock was essential if interest was to be maintained.

Successful training was given in handling horses, milking, harvesting, and the operation and even repair of machinery. Farm women and boys who planned to drive tractors for the first time requested special short courses on this one job and profited from them.

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A byproduct of this preparatory training was to sort the city folk who were really interested in farm work from those who only thought they were. When properly organized and used, these sessions could be a yearly source of summer workers. Several States add a caution, however, about the use of preliminary training schools. They can fail miserably if they are too vague or casual, or unless there is a real job waiting for those who attend.

Work Leader Development

Many of the city women and youth who enrolled for wartime farm labor worked as crews or groups. These WLA and VFV people were often housed in camps, moving out to the job each day. Others lived at home in town, reporting at designated stations each morning for assignment and transportation to the farm. Both these "day-hauls" and those who lived in camps were more productive and better satisfied when foremen or work leaders stayed with them, teaching them the varied jobs and maintaining an efficient routine.

Some of these work leaders were volunteers, but it soon was evident that the system was more satisfactory when they were paid. With crews of some 10 or more, farmers received enough more good work from the supervised crews to warrant paying leaders wages that ran around \$6 a day. Sometimes with smaller crews leaders spent part of their time doing the same work as the others. Full leader attention to training and supervision proved most desirable as a rule.

Work leaders were trained at formal and informal sessions conducted by selected farmers, fieldmen from commercial industries, high school teachers, and extension personnel. Emphasis was placed on the best methods of handling and training a crew and the method of teaching a green worker how to do a particular job. With the aid of subject-matter specialists familiar jobs such as thinning sugar beets, cutting apricots, shearing sheep, thinning apples, picking lemons, berries, cherries, tomatoes, and beans, harvesting cotton, topping sugar beets, picking up potatoes, and many others were broken down into the routine that it had been found easiest for the beginner to learn.

With training and experience these work leaders became really professionals and were able to increase the output (and earnings) of those under them at the same time they increased the uniformity and quality of the work they did. Accidents were lessened and the turn-over of this recruited labor decreased materially.

Experienced work leaders were also able to adjust the activities of their crews to the particular needs of the farm on which they happened to be working. Picking tomatoes for shipment is different from picking tomatoes for immediate canning. Sugar beets are spaced 12 inches apart for some farms and 8 inches to 10 inches on others. Some strawberries are picked with hulls left on; others with hulls off. Making these adjustments consistently, and happily, requires experienced leadership.

Work leaders also provided a satisfactory means for breaking in crews of foreign workers, Mexican nationals, Jamaicans, and German prisoners of war. Language differences, unfamiliarity with American crops, customs, and foods required training skill and experience to keep these workers satisfied and to enable them to satisfy the farmers.

Many farmers were qualified to serve as work leaders for these inexperienced crews, but most of them found it profitable to use paid leaders, if available, and spend their own time on organization and managerial problems.

Training Aids for Farm Operators

Efficient, paid work leaders make a practical answer to training problems where crews are employed, but they rarely fit into the average-size diversified farm. On these average farms the hired workers range from a single boy to two or three extra hands. When those extras are inexperienced, as they often were during the war, the farmer himself has to do the training. Live-in VFW's, live-in WLA's, live-in men workers, and the local groups that come out for special harvest jobs--all these must be trained and supervised by the farmer himself.

Shortening that training job for the farm operator, and making it easier and more effective was another opportunity for Extension's farm labor program. Some farmers are good trainers; some are not. Some enjoy breaking in new workers; others don't. All were anxious to lessen the time and effort required to get new hands into full production.

Some sessions on training a person how to train were held in several of the States. These informal courses ranged in length from 2 hours to 2 days. They were refresher sessions on how to gain the interest of a new worker and explain a new task so that he would catch on quickly. They were successful and useful; but they can reach only a few farm operators. Other methods were essential.

Publicity of various types was accepted as the only way to make training aids available generally. Through news items and the radio repeated emphasis was placed upon the differences between good and poor training, how we who know how to do a job forget or overlook the many details that a beginner has to learn, how hard it is to remember things unless our "teacher" ties them to something with which we are familiar or something that we really want.

With the help of the State subject-matter specialists many of the standard farm jobs were broken down into the essential steps, and a printed, illustrated description of this method was distributed through the county agents and farm labor assistants. These leaflets were really notes that a farmer could use to save himself the time and trouble of figuring out the details.

Other news items, radio talks, pamphlets, and even movies were made to explain the relationship between a farm family and the city boy or girl who came out to work for them and live with them. A cooperative, friendly attitude on the part of each has proved to be an essential. Most cases of dissatisfied farmer-employers, and of city boys who quit after the first day or two on the farm, may be traced to a poor attitude on the part of one or both.

It is difficult to tell how effective this publicity was in smoothing out the training problems on the average farm. It is true, however, that green 16-year-olds and city women were used with increasing satisfaction by farm people who believed such workers hopeless at the start. There are many cases of failure; but good training has proved itself and is earning the same respect that farm families and their city-bred workers now give each other.

Better Work Methods

Proper attitudes, job break-downs, thoughtful presentations of how and why; friendly coaching of the beginner's first attempts; enthusiasm where those attempts succeed; all the parts of successful training lead naturally to a study of the shorter, easier, cheaper ways to do a job.

On most farms the work methods in use are the products of years of experience--years in which some farmers have constantly searched for easier, quicker ways of doing their work--years in which other farmers have faithfully followed the ways handed down to each succeeding generation with little change. One of the big problems was to make this latter group of farmers conscious of the possibilities of better work methods.

Early results of farm work simplification studies indicated that appreciable savings in man-hours could be made on many farm jobs. Publicity of these savings helped to focus the farmer's attention upon his own ways of doing the same job. Farmers became interested in learning of these easier methods and in trying them out on their own farms. The difficulty, however, was in the fact that only a relatively few farm jobs were being studied. Consequently, the savings applied to only a small segment of the total farm jobs. The task was to get every farmer thinking of his own work methods.

Job methods training courses were given to extension workers in many of the States. Specialists then used the principles to analyze practices that they were recommending to farmers to be sure that the easiest and best method was being suggested. Through the home management specialists work methods in the farm home were examined by the homemaker in an effort to ease the housework and enable her to help more with the outside farm work. A 4-H "Better Methods" project was started on a State and national basis. All told, the principles of work improvement were brought to the attention of farm people in many ways. They became conscious of work methods, and savings resulted--savings that made an appreciable contribution and helped to get the job done during the war.

Labor Management Discussions

Good instruction and easy work methods help to lighten the labor load. But unless the worker is content, satisfied with his living and working conditions, he will not do a full day of productive work. It was toward this problem that the Extension Farm Labor Program also directed its attention.

Labor management meetings were held in several States to give farmers a chance to exchange ideas and discuss their experiences in the use of seasonal workers. They discussed the problems peculiar to the different types of workers, hours worked, wages paid, lunches furnished, and so on. Farmers told each other about their problems of supervision and training, and how they had worked out easier ways to do the various jobs.

Such get-togethers in special crop areas during the winter months not only give farmers an opportunity to learn from one another, but they bring together a key group interested in improving their ability to handle groups of workers. Demonstrations on correct instruction (JIT) and on how to work with people (JRT) have added greatly to the success of these meetings.

